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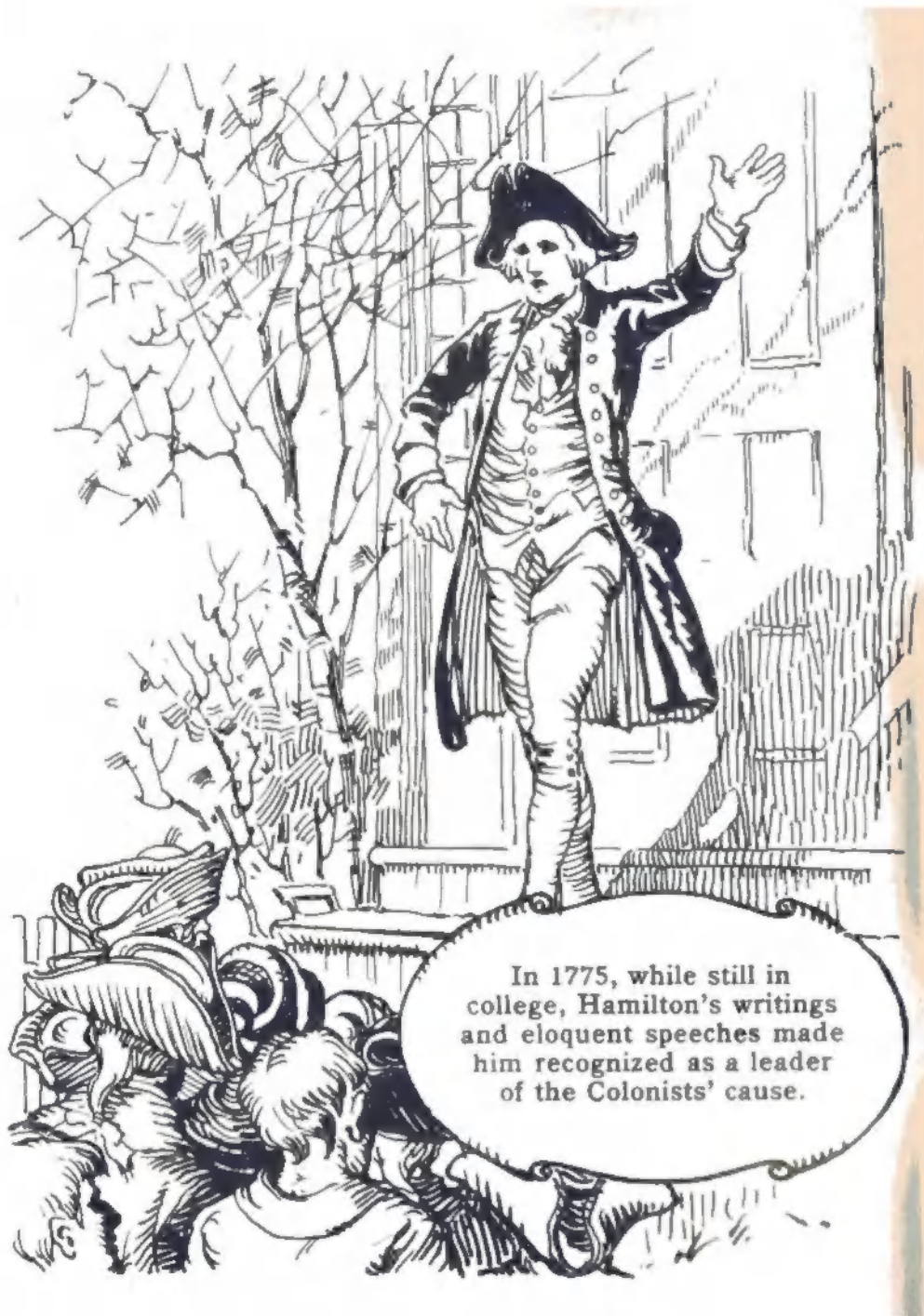
Alexander Hamilton

MASTER-SPIRIT OF THE
NEW AMERICA



Alexander Hamilton was the first Secretary of the Treasury
and the confidential advisor of President Washington.

John Hancock
Mutual Life Insurance Company
Boston, Mass.



In 1775, while still in college, Hamilton's writings and eloquent speeches made him recognized as a leader of the Colonists' cause.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON

*Master-Spirit
of the New America*

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"He stamped the impress of his character and personality upon the national history, and is entitled to a full share of that glory which mankind awards to the founders of great States."

ALEXANDER HAMILTON

Master-Spirit of the New America

ALEXANDER HAMILTON, proud, passionate, ingenious, brilliant, has been called the greatest American, the most intelligent and romantic of all American statesmen, the greatest lawyer, penman, orator of his day, and the one man to whom we are the most deeply indebted for our strong national government and our independence among nations. His battle cry was, we must be one people, one nation,—not thirteen separate peoples and states. His was one of the master minds that moulded our Constitution, that conceived our cherished ideals of united strength at home and respect among nations abroad. He was one of the Master-Spirits of the New America.

On the beautiful island of Nevis in the West Indies, Hamilton was born, of gentle parentage, on the 11th of January, 1757. As a small boy he was precocious, sensitive, affectionate, and deeply attached to his mother, a brilliant and beautiful woman. She read to him for hours at a time and taught him French almost as soon as he could talk. The Reverend Hugh Knox instructed him in Latin and Mathematics and allowed him the use of his extensive library. At an early age he developed a keen intellect, a fiery energy, and a remarkable capacity for labor, which characterized him to the end of his days.

Alexander's mother died when he was eleven years old. His father failed in business, so that Alexander was soon forced to earn

his own living. At the age of twelve he went to work for Nicholas Cruger, a storekeeper at St. Croix, where he worked for three years; first, as a general clerk, attending to the loading and unloading of Mr. Cruger's sloops, then as a bookkeeper, then as manager of a branch store, and finally (when only fourteen) as sole manager of the counting house, having complete charge while Mr. Cruger made a business journey to America.

During his first year in the store he wrote to his chum, Edward Stevens:

" . . . for to confess my weakness, Ned, my ambition is prevalent, so that I condemn the grovelling condition of a clerk, or the like, to which my fortune condemns me, and would willingly risk my life, though not my character, to exalt my station."

During these laborious years he acquired habits of concentration and accuracy and a knowledge of business which were essential to the great task he was to perform as a man.

But his work in the store did not interrupt his reading and study. He read from sundown until midnight, studying Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Mathematics with Reverend Knox; and when he had learned all that that estimable gentleman could teach him, reading Pope, Plutarch, Shakespeare, Milton, Plato, and other English poets, Greek philosophers, English and European historians, until he had read every book he could find on the island. He longed to go on to school and college; but he had no money, so he lived on, working, studying, dreaming.

AT COLLEGE

SUDDENLY in August, 1772, Hamilton's dream of a college education came true. A terrific hurricane swept St. Croix, causing great wreckage and ruin. He wrote a description of the storm, which was printed anonymously in the nearby island of St. Kitts. When the Governor of St. Croix and some of Hamilton's wealthy relatives read the description and learned that the boy Alexander had written it, they decided that such unusual talent should not be wasted. The proud relatives gave him the necessary

money to go to America to college. Within a few weeks he set sail for America—the country he was destined to love and serve with all the ardor of his soul and power of his mind, and which in turn was to honor him as one of her most cherished and devoted sons.

After six weeks at sea (during the voyage the ship caught fire and they were a day and a night extinguishing the flames) he landed in Boston late in October, 1772, and took passage immediately to New York. For a year he attended Francis Barber's grammar school at Elizabethtown, New Jersey. In the autumn of 1773, when sixteen years old, Alexander entered King's College, New York, (now Columbia University), as a private student. He not only took such courses as he desired for himself, but he attended lectures with his friend, Edward Stevens, who was studying medicine. He employed a tutor, and set himself so many tasks to accomplish each day. He remained in college for two years, working with extraordinary swiftness and industry, finding time for college debates, the issuing of political pamphlets, the writing of verses, and for society.

While he was yet a student the quarrel between the American Colonies and England was reaching a crisis. In July, 1774, a great mass meeting was held in what is now known as City Hall Park to influence New York to act with the other Colonies against British oppression. Hamilton attended the meeting, listened to long and dry speeches which were not winning the people to the Colonists' side, until he could keep still no longer. He sprang to the platform, began talking slowly at first; but as he warmed up to his subject he felt the people agreeing with him, and finally he won them to his side by delivering a bold and eloquent explanation of the rights and grievances of the Colonies. The people were amazed to hear such arguments from a small, delicate looking youth of seventeen. The name of Hamilton spread through the city and state, and he was marked as a future leader of the Colonial cause.

The following year, while he was still in college, Hamilton published anonymously two political pamphlets, *A Full Vindication of Congress* and *The Farmer Refuted*. These papers showed so much knowledge of history and the true principles of Colonial Government

that when it became known that Hamilton had written them, men's minds turned to him as a leader. Nothing so brilliant had been contributed to the Colonists' cause.

In May, 1775, war with England having begun, the Congress met and appointed George Washington as Commander-in-Chief of the Army. The same year Hamilton issued another political pamphlet entitled *Remarks on the Quebec Bill*. He also took part in a number of public debates. But his work was not all to be done by writing and talking. Hamilton always valued himself more highly as a soldier than as a writer, orator, or statesman.

While in college he had joined a volunteer corps called the *Hearts of Oak*, drilled in the churchyard of St. George's Chapel early in the morning, and wore a uniform of green with brown leather facings and the appropriate motto *Freedom or Death*. He turned from constitutional law to a study of tactics and strategy; and with his comrades in arms, when removing the guns from the harbor battery, drew the first fire from the British in the state of New York.

Hamilton, now nineteen years old, applied for a commission and on March 14, 1776, was appointed Captain of a New York company of artillery. He applied himself with characteristic thoughtfulness and diligence to the drilling of his men. He also wrote several letters to the Provincial Congress, asking for more pay, better food and equipment for his company. These letters prove his ability and good judgment in military matters.

In August, 1776, Hamilton's company was drawn into the battle of Long Island, when Washington opposed the British attack on New York. Beginning with the morning of the 28th, Hamilton had his baptism of fire on one of the bloodiest battlefields of the Revolution. His company behaved well, and he was in the thick of the fight all day. He was driven from his position finally, and lost his baggage and a field gun. On the night of the 29th, when the Americans made their famous retreat across East River, Washington stood at the head of the ferry stairs until four o'clock in the morning when the last man embarked. The last man was Hamilton. Two months later Captain Alexander Hamilton's two-gun battery was among the reinforcements sent to Chatterton's Hill. On November

16, in the British attack on Fort Washington, Hamilton had again been forced to retreat. An officer wrote of him in this movement:

"I noticed a youth, a mere stripling, small, slender, almost delicate in frame, marching beside a piece of artillery, with a cocked hat pulled down over his eyes, apparently lost in thought with his hand resting on the cannon, and every now and then patting it as he mused, as if it were a favorite horse, or a pet plaything." A friend wrote of Hamilton's ability as a Captain: "Well do I remember the day when Hamilton's company marched into Princeton. It was a model of discipline; at their head was a boy, and I wondered at his youth; but what was my surprise when struck with his slight figure, he was pointed out to me as that Hamilton of whom we had already heard so much."

After taking part in the battles of Trenton and Princeton at Christmas time, Hamilton, with his original company of 91 men and four officers, now reduced to about 30 men, went into winter quarters with Washington at Morristown in January, 1777.

PRIVATE SECRETARY TO WASHINGTON

HAMILTON, now twenty, had so impressed Washington that the great General made him one of his own Aides-de-Camp, his Private Secretary, and a member of his staff with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. This event marked the beginning of Hamilton's distinctly national career. For four years, March, 1777, until February, 1781, Hamilton held this office and was in daily and hourly contact with Washington as the most trusted member of his staff. Washington loved him as he probably never loved anyone else. When they were alone he called him, "My boy," an endearment he never gave another. He was a favorite at headquarters—Harrison christened him "The Little Lion."

Washington trusted Hamilton with the writing of his most important papers and letters, especially those to Congress. Hamilton so organized and planned his correspondence that he found time to read a great deal, to keep informed on the commercial and political as well as the military events of the day, to write, among other

things, a synopsis of an extensive history of Great Britain, to go on important missions for Washington, and to take part in minor skirmishes.

During the war America had no strong central government which could collect sufficient taxes to send money, food, and guns to Washington's soldiers. Often his men went hungry and cold and without ammunition simply because the government had no money with which to buy these necessities. In 1780 Robert Morris took charge of the finances of the Federal Government. Hamilton, now twenty-three, held Morris in great respect, and upon hearing of his appointment, sent him an anonymous memorandum on the establishment of a National Bank. In the following year he sent a second letter to Morris, this time under his own name, with an elaborate plan and articles of constitution for a national bank.

His plans were so advanced that Morris dared adopt several suggestions in part only, and founded the bank of Pennsylvania by way of experiment. It is amazing to find a young soldier like Hamilton, with his hands full of laborious correspondence, with no experience in business beyond what he had gained as a boy in a merchant's store, plunging into a detailed and forcible argument for the establishment of a national bank. Later on, in his own illustrious administration as Secretary of the Treasury, he was able to realize his ideal.

Hamilton married Miss Elizabeth Schuyler, daughter of General Schuyler, who belonged to one of the great families of New York, in December, 1780. Eight children were born to them.

Ever active of body as well as of mind, Hamilton grew impatient of his long hours and hours of work over papers and letters at Washington's headquarters and longed for a command in the field. As the war progressed his restlessness increased until finally, in February, 1781, he resigned his staff position, and in the following summer obtained command of a light corps. In October, when Cornwallis was surrounded at Yorktown, he found his chance for action. His assault upon the first redoubt at Yorktown was an effective deed, and showed the highest qualities of swiftness, judgment, leadership, and courage.

THE CONTINENTALIST

FROM February until August of 1781 Hamilton wrote four of the six papers known as *The Continentalist*; the other two were written the next spring and summer. These papers enumerated the faults of the existing league of states, and argued for a strong central government, explaining the powers that such a government should have.

After the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, Hamilton resigned his commission in the army and in May, 1782, accepted for a few months the office of receiver of the continental taxes for the state of New York. Then he decided to take up law in earnest. For five months he applied himself diligently to his law books, and, at the age of twenty-five, won admission to the bar. During his study he had composed a manual on the practice of law, which, it is said, "served as an instructive grammar to future students and became the groundwork of later enlarged law documents." He was almost immediately elected a delegate to the National Congress by the New York legislature, taking his seat in October. During his eight months of service in Congress he was chairman of a committee of three to deal with the mutiny of troops at Philadelphia and at Lancaster. He seized every opportunity to contend for a stronger central government.

Hamilton, a poor man with a family to support, refused to be reelected to Congress; because, as he wrote to Governor Clinton of New York in May, 1783: "I owe it to myself without delay to enter upon the care of my private concerns in earnest." He opened his law office at No. 58 Wall street, New York, taking as his partner Balthazar De Heart. For the next three years Hamilton practiced law diligently, and took a leading place among the great lawyers of his day. He tried many famous cases and organized the Bank of New York. All he needed to do to make his fortune was to keep out of politics and public affairs, but this he could not do.

After the Revolution was over, Washington and Hamilton saw dangers ahead more grave than any they had yet surmounted. They knew that the future of their country depended upon a firm union, and that a firm union was impossible without a strong central

government. The present government was a make-believe. It had no real strength. It had no property, no money, and no way of collecting any. Washington wrote: "Unless Congress may have powers competent to all general purposes the distresses we have encountered, the expense we have incurred, and the blood we have spilt, will avail us nothing."

Hamilton replied: "It now only remains to make solid establishments within, to perpetuate our Union . . . in fine, to make our independence truly a blessing." Hamilton saw the great beauty and resources of America on the one hand and on the other the weaknesses and debts of the government, the antagonizing jealousies of the thirteen states, the sufferings of the people from the low value of money and the high cost of food and clothing. Stirred with a passion of patriotism, Hamilton neglected his own interests for those of his fellow countrymen.

Even though America had recently overcome England, the richest and proudest country in Europe, she could not endure unless she was established as one strong nation with a strong central government instead of thirteen separate states, and unless she had money back of that government to give it power. The success of Washington as Commander-in-Chief in the war, the accomplishments of Jefferson and Hancock in drafting and signing the *Declaration of Independence*, the negotiations of Franklin at foreign courts, might all have been in vain had it not been for the work of Alexander Hamilton, who finally moulded the United States into one great nation with a firm financial basis, giving us unlimited prosperity and happiness at home and power and respect among nations abroad.

American trade had been greatly handicapped since the Revolutionary War. European nations refused to enter into treaties with the United States, because they could not tell whether they were dealing with a single nation or thirteen distinct states. Finally, in 1786, Virginia called a Conference of all the states to meet at Annapolis to consider the commercial situation. Only five states responded. Hamilton was a representative from New York. The Conference sent to all the states a copy of an address written by

Hamilton, which explained the evils of the present system, proposed a remedy, and urged a convention of delegates from all the states to meet in Philadelphia in May, 1787. Thus Hamilton, not yet thirty, was the one man responsible for the great Convention at Philadelphia which resulted in the framing and adopting of that most marvelous document, the Constitution of the United States.

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

IT took four long months of hot discussion behind closed doors to evolve the Constitution. Hamilton proposed a scheme of government which was adopted in many details. He is said to have written the preamble, the best statement of the objects of free government to be found in any language. It has been recorded that: "There is not in the Constitution of the United States an element of order, of force, of duration, which he (Hamilton) did not powerfully contribute to introduce into it, and to cause to predominate."

But great as was Hamilton's work in framing the Constitution, his prodigious services and surpassing genius in convincing the reluctant people to accept that Constitution was a far greater service to his country, and established his fame as the greatest Constitutional lawyer and statesman of his day.

THE FEDERALIST

HAMILTON had determined upon a plan of education to instruct the people in the questions of the new government and the Constitution which involved their rights and liberties. He planned to issue a series of papers addressed to the people. He was aided by James Madison, who wrote fourteen papers and collaborated with Hamilton on three others, and by John Jay, who wrote five. Hamilton himself wrote sixty-three. Through the long day he worked at his law practice, then wrote his papers at home at night. The papers were widely circulated and universally read. The meaning and purpose of every clause of the Constitution was made so clear that *The Federalist*, more than any other influence, was responsible

for the adoption of the Constitution. Hamilton's style, for purity, distinction, and profound thinking combined with simplicity, has never been excelled.

His most spectacular achievement of this period was his winning New York state to the side of the Constitution in the Constitutional Convention held at Albany. Hamilton opposed Governor Clinton, and spoke in the Convention almost daily for three weeks, sometimes talking for six hours at a time, until enough delegates were won to his side to ratify the Constitution. Hamilton found himself tremendously popular. The Federalists, his political colleagues, held a parade in New York city. The chief float was a ship, named *The Hamilton*, fully manned, armed, and equipped. Returning to New York, he was greeted with the blaze of bonfire and the salute of cannon, and the city was nicknamed *Hamiltonapolis*.

SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY

WHEN Washington became the first President of the United States under the new Constitution, he found that the National Treasury was not only empty, but that the nation was eighty million dollars in debt, and that there was no way of collecting money. The government owned no property, and could collect no taxes. Without funds a nation can do nothing. Washington realized this situation and selected for his Secretary of the Treasury the one man in America who could put the country on a firm financial basis. That man was Hamilton. Probably in all the world's history no statesman save Alexander Hamilton has had to undertake so great a task with such small resources at his command when he set to work to lift the nation out of debt and establish public credit.

Although Hamilton served in Washington's cabinet a little more than five years (September, 1789-January, 1795) his ideas still direct the course of American history, and are likely to do so for some time to come. He made plans for collecting taxes and revenues by the national government until enough money came into the Treasury to give the government power; he established the country's credit at home and in Europe by paying off every debt charged

against the states. His reports on Public Credit, on National Banking, and on Manufactures laid the foundations upon which our public credit, our financial system, and the prosperity of the United States are built.

Hamilton's measures were to be sorely tried before they proved their worth. An extra tax was levied upon distilled liquors; and some manufacturers of whiskey in the mountains of Pennsylvania refused to pay it and took up arms against the government. Hamilton, in 1794, spent several months suppressing the "Whiskey Rebellion;" he accompanied the armed forces of the government, and although acting without a military command, he practically had charge of directing the troops. The manufacturers were forced to pay the extra tax, but what is more important, the whole country saw and realized that the new government now had the power to enforce the laws made by Congress.

Besides serving as Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton acted as chief political adviser to Washington and was from time to time called upon to deliver reports on almost every question that came before the new government. He worked at his office fourteen hours a day with no help from anyone.

But in all his endeavors Hamilton met with merciless opposition. People feared his idea of a strong central government, thinking that it might become intolerable and tyrannical. He was thought wild and visionary. Not until he had answered their every question and argued away their last doubt would they accept his then revolutionary ideas. Audiences sometimes refused to let him speak, because they knew the spell of his personality and the magic of his arguments.

When lecturing in New York, 1795, in defense of the treaty which Jay had made with England, he was stoned. Even Congress could not always trust itself to be influenced by his personality, and insisted that he write out some of his reports rather than deliver them in an address before that august body. But no opposition could stop the publication of his papers. Practically every important political event of his day was explained in some article written by him.

The letters of *Pacificus*, a series of eight articles, were written during the summer and autumn of 1793, stating reasons why America could not afford to give aid to France, then at war with England. Hamilton realized that America had yet hardly recovered from her own war and that another war might mean her ruin. These papers rank among the best treatises ever written upon international rights and duties.

Then in February, 1794, he wrote the letters signed *Americanus* to stem the tide of feeling against England; and in July, 1795, he published the letters of *Horatius* and began the series of nearly forty letters signed *Camillus* to explain the treaty which John Jay had made with England and to justify the Senate and Washington in ratifying the treaty. Of all Hamilton's writings, *Camillus* ranks highest.

Hamilton resigned from the Cabinet because he felt that the work which he had been called to do for his country was done. The States were independent, united, financially sound, and at peace. He had given the best years of his life to his country, and for his services he took less than a living wage. He began as a penniless student, and never as a soldier or statesman did he make enough money to support his family. Now he was in debt. The last nine years of his life, while practicing law, he succeeded in earning about \$12,000 annually, in discharging most of his debts, and in providing for his wife and children. When Hamilton resigned from the Cabinet, January 3, 1795, Washington wrote to him: "In every relation which you have borne to me I have found that my confidence in your talents, exertions and integrity has been well placed. I the more freely render this testimony of my approbation, because I speak from opportunities of information, which cannot deceive me, and which furnish satisfactory proof of your title to public regard."

From the date of his retirement from Washington's Cabinet until his death he practiced law in New York, where he was acknowledged the leader of the bar and the head of the historic and powerful Federal Party. He lent his fiery zeal and passionate nature to the cause of his Party. The Federalists issued journals from time to

time and he contributed a great many articles to them. He assisted William Cobbett in establishing his *Weekly Political Register*, which appeared from 1794 to 1800. In 1801, Hamilton, with several other well-known Federalists, founded the *New York Evening Post*.

One of Hamilton's greatest political opponents was Aaron Burr. They were the staunch leaders in opposite parties. For years they had been great rivals. In 1800, when Thomas Jefferson was elected President and Burr Vice-President, Hamilton had opposed Burr. Again in 1804, when Burr ran for Governor of New York state, Hamilton used his influence against his election. Hamilton had so angered Burr by an attack upon his conduct in this campaign, that the latter sought to rid himself of such a powerful opponent and challenged Hamilton to a duel. Hamilton, although he did not believe in duelling (his eldest son had been killed in a duel just two years earlier) dared not refuse. He and Burr met on the 11th of July, 1804, under the heights of Weehawken, upon a grassy platform overlooking the Hudson River. Hamilton fell, mortally wounded, at the first fire. He died the following day, at the age of forty-seven.

AN APPRECIATION

HAMILTON, only about five feet seven inches tall, was exceedingly handsome, possessed of high spirits, bright eyes, and remarkable vivacity. He loved the society of his friends, good wine and beautiful things—even clothes and ruffles of fine lace. He hated sham and untruth. His courage never flagged, he knew no fear. He believed in action, in getting things done; yet he never did anything just because it would bring him applause or fame. He did things because they were right and had to be done for the happiness of his fellow men and the prosperity of his country, which he loved so much. Even when opposing his greatest enemies he never acted in the spirit of revenge. He always saw the greater good that comes from labor, suffering, and sacrifice. To him politics, the nation, the union, and the Constitution were sacred; and he forgot himself and spent his life in a passionate devotion to these sacred ideals.

Hamilton has often been called the greatest political genius that America has ever produced. Once he said to a friend: "Men give me some credit for genius; all the genius I have lies in just this: When I have a subject in hand I study it profoundly. Day and night it is before me. I explore it in all its bearings, my mind becomes pervaded with it. Then the effort which I make, the people are pleased to call the fruits of genius. It is the fruit of labor and thought."

The reason of Alexander Hamilton's great honor is the endurance of his handiwork. After a century, the development of the country and the growth of population which he foresaw have come to pass, our relations with other countries are still governed by the principles which he upheld, our union of the states and the Constitution, which he fought to establish, are stronger today than ever before. "As time has gone on, Hamilton's fame has grown, and he stands today as the most brilliant statesman we have produced. His constructive mind and far reaching intellect are visible in every part of our system of government which is the best monument of his genius." He was, indeed, the Master-Spirit of the New America.

